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BAALBEK -THE MYSTERY OF LEBANON

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In Lebanon, 85 km northeast of the capital city Beirut, at a level of about 1150 m, there is one of the most spectacular and mysterious remains of the ancient world: the temple area of Baalbek. The mystery of Baalbek has been increased by some modern scholars, who think that extraterrestrials (the ancient astronauts) have possibly built the massive pre-Roman structures and used them as a landing place for their rockets.

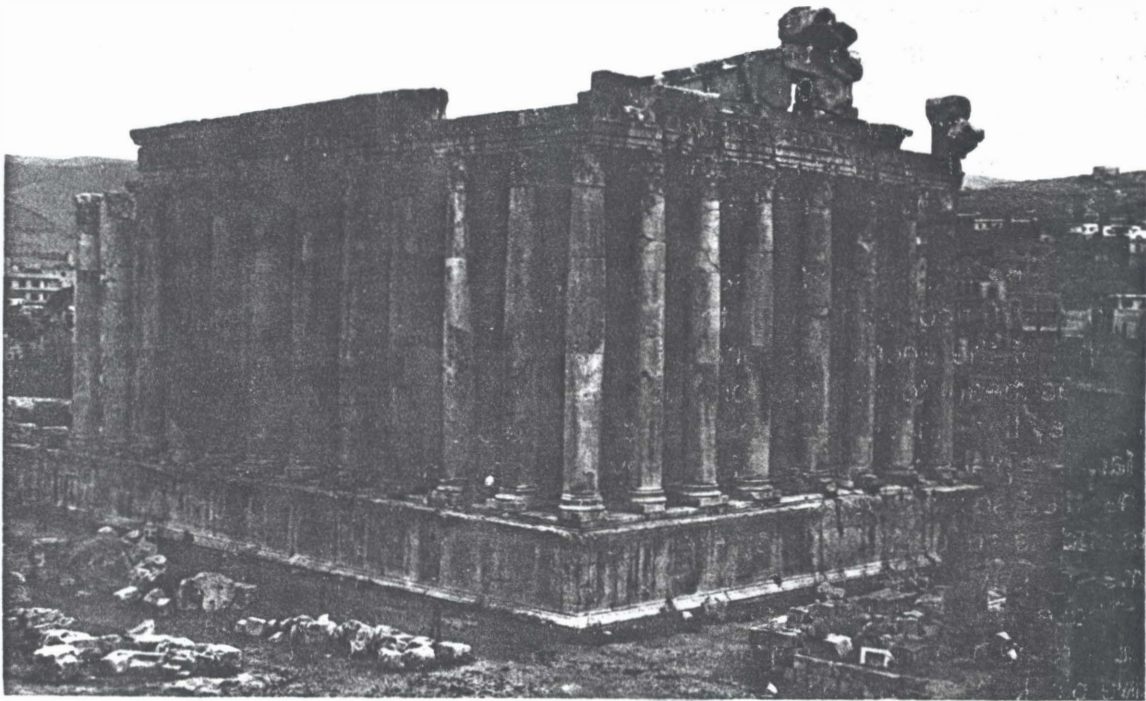
The name Baalbek is Semitic and is related to the Semitic God Baal. Baal means simply "Lord" or "master" but it is also a name of a specific god, who was a son of the sun god El and the sea goddess Ashera. These supreme gods of the Canaanites could not be approached directly but only through the mediation of a "family member", their son Baal. He was the master of rain, tempest and thunder. The latter part of the name Baalbek means that it was located at the upper part of the valley of Beqa'a serving as a religious centre. So the name Baalbek can simply mean Lord of the Beqa'a.

There is little archaeological evidence to throw light on the origin of the site. We know from the general history of the area about the presence of the Canaanites, Arameans, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians and Persians, but in Baalbek there are few traces of them. The excavations before the wars of Lebanon in 1970's in the Great Court of the Temple of Jupiter revealed evidence of human life back to the early Bronze Age (2900 - 2300 B.C.). The best remains in the area date back to the pre-Roman and Roman period up to second century A.D.

In 31 B.C. Octavian, triumvir and future emperor of Rome, chased Mark Antony and Cleopatra from Syria. Berytus (Beirut) became a Roman colony, which in the beginning included Heliopolis (Baalbek). It is in this context that the construction of the Roman Temples at Baalbek was begun. These Roman Temples have lasted well until our days. Let's hope that they will escape destruction also in the future.

The mystery of the Temple of Jupiter

During the reign of the Roman emperor Nero (37 -68 A.D.) after many years of construction work the Temple of Jupiter was probably nearing completion. Now there is not much remaining but six magnificent columns and a massive platform and podium under them. Still these are one of the most mysterious remains of the ancient world. The fact remains that this construction involved the cutting,



The magnificent Temple of Bacchus is a masterpiece of Roman architecture. (Photo by Teuvo Mikkonen)



The six remaining columns of the Temple of Jupiter resting upon the pre-Roman podium wall. (Photo by Teuvo Mikkonen)

transporting and lifting of the largest and heaviest stones of all times. Not only had a wall 12 m high to be composed of three ranges of stones, but the middle blocks were made of a length four times their height. And with a depth equal to the height, the volume amounted to 400 m³ per block, corresponding to a weight of about 1000 tons. Because of those massive three blocks of the middle layer Baalbek was known for a long time primarily as the site of the three stones, "the trilithon", and for centuries people believed that these blocks had been placed there by superhuman giants.

Each one of these and lesser but still impressive blocks are precisely shaped and perfectly fitting. According to Modest Agrest, Zecharia Sitchin and other proponents of the ancient astronaut theory this is a proof that this platform and podium was meant to be used for much more purpose than just a platform for the temple. They think that it was constructed well before Roman era and was meant to be a landing place for spacecrafts. They also say, that the ancient men couldn't have handled so massive stones. Sitchin has also examined the ancient cuneiform tablets and he suggests that they like other local legends agree that the place is of extreme antiquity and it was meant to be a place from which to "scale the heavens".

Those, who built the platform and the podium, have been technically skilful. We must remember that even now there is no single crane that can lift such a massive block. We would need about 100 cranes that are used in building houses to lift one block of about 1000 tons. Of course there are other means to move massive objects which don't need so much lift power.

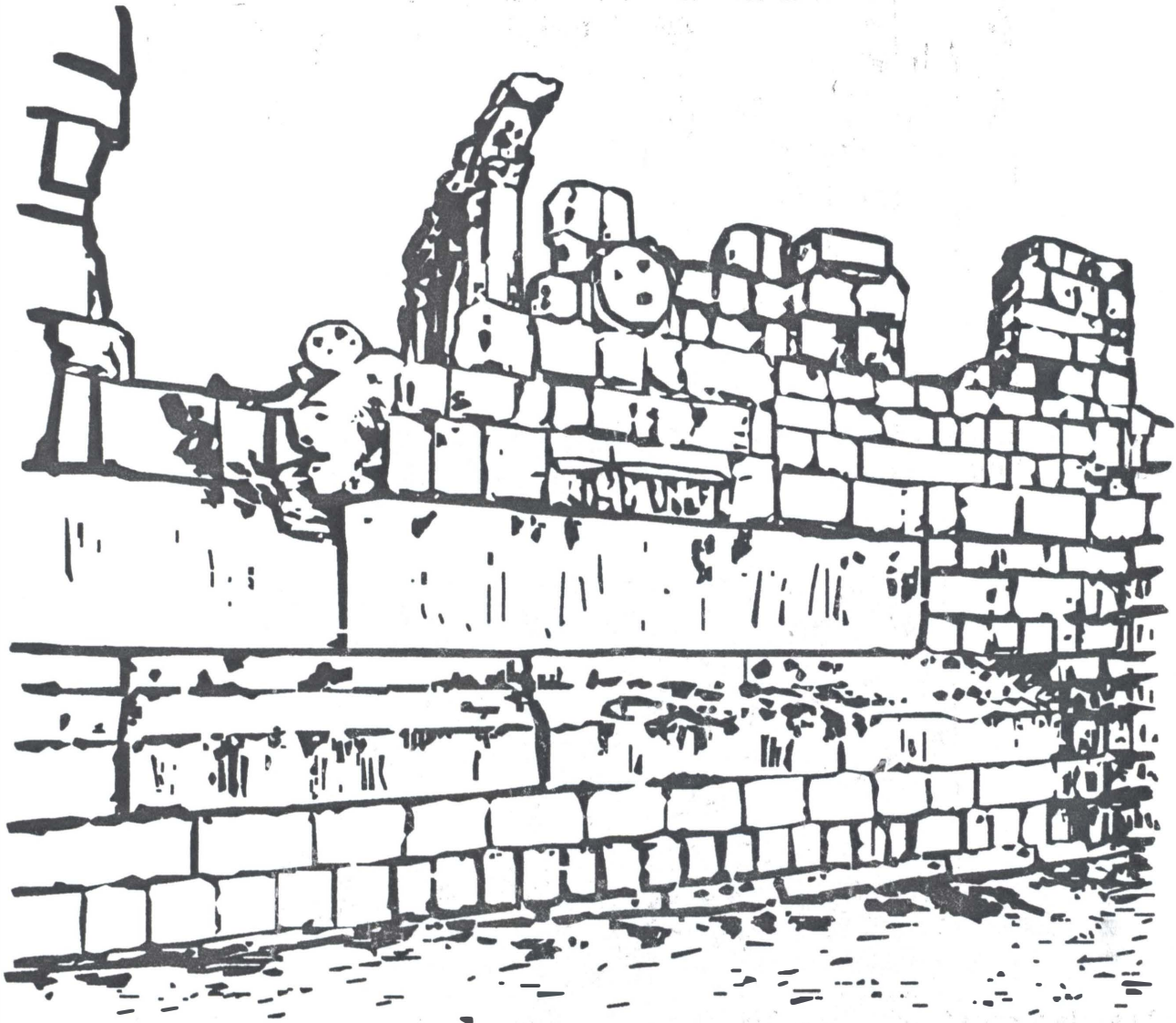
Who built the platform and the podium?

This question has been annoying the archaeologists for a long time. As noted earlier, the temple dates from the reign of Nero, as indicated by an inscription on top of a column shaft. This is one of the rare instances we have of a definite reference date on the construction of the temple. Some archaeologists point that a discarded column drum, once intended for the Temple of Jupiter, has been used in the foundation below the Trilithon, which according to them proves that temple and podium were executed at the same time.

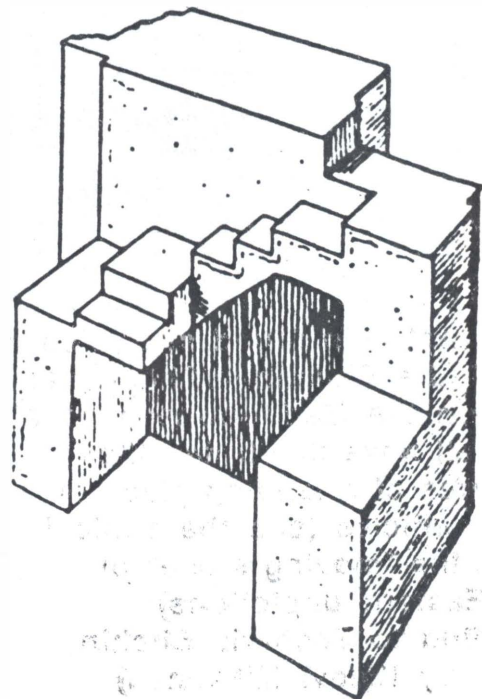
On the other hand there are no historical records of any kind about the building of the platform and podium in any Roman scriptures. This would have been a good chance for any emperor or other boss to boast about, so why they didn't do so? Maybe the Romans weren't the builders. Maybe that that one column drum was where it was because the Romans were eager to repair old buildings like they used to do in Egypt.

Quarrying and transporting the big stones

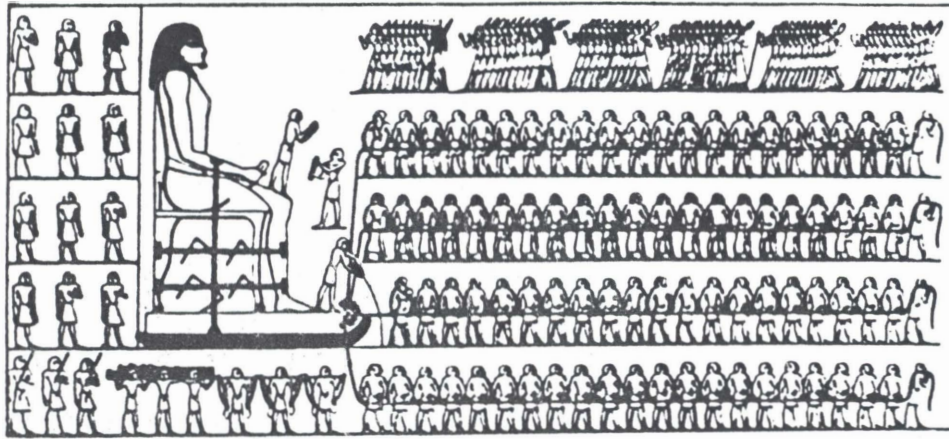
There are two quarries near Baalbek which supplied the enormous masses of stone which were needed for the construction of the monuments. One, which is about 1 km long, is at a higher level than the great temples and at an average distance of only 500 m Southwest from the ruins. This quarry provided all the big blocks which were difficult to transport. One big stone is still remaining. It is the biggest cut stone in the world, originally destined to continue the Trilithon. Being 21,72 m long and averaging a cross-section of 4,80 by 4,80 m, which translates into



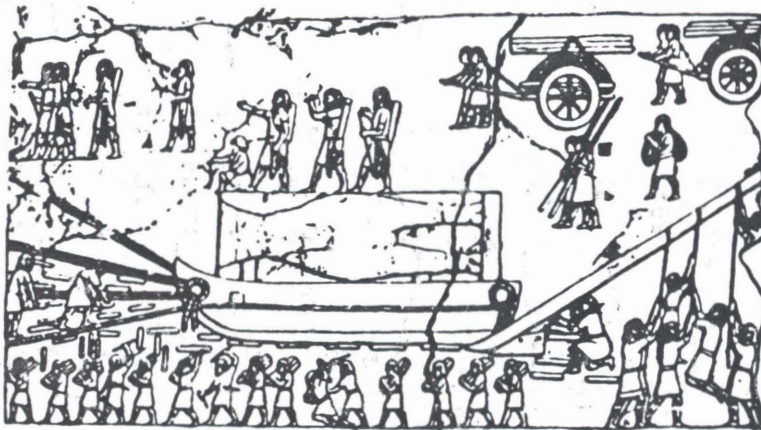
An illustration of the famous south end of the Trilithon with three gigantic blocks weighting 1000 tons each.



A massive single block from the stairway tower of the Temple of Bacchus in Baalbek.



Transportation of a 60-ton pharaonic statue by means of a sleigh and large pulling crews.



Assyrian relief showing the transportation of a sculpture by means of a sleigh on rollers and a lever.

An ancient coin found at Byblos, one of the Canaanite/Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast may well have illustrated the structures of a landing place of space vehicles (see the conical object, the "moving stone" of Near Eastern depictions) according to Zecharia Sitchin. (Photo by Kalevi Mikkonen)



a volume of about 500 m³ and a weight of about 1200 - 1300 tons, the block was never fully separated from its base. The block is commonly called "Stone of the Pregnant Woman". There are not many traces of Roman quarrying techniques in this quarry, which could mean that the stones were cut and transported before the Roman era.

The other quarry is in the middle of the plain, about 2 km north of the town. It has remained practically unchanged since Roman times and offers many clues to Roman quarrying techniques.

It hasn't been easy to extract the big stones from the face of the natural rock, but according to the archaeologists it could have been done with the technique they knew. Vertical grooves were cut around each block from the top down, wide enough to allow space for a man to work. The natural rock being somewhat softer, metal picks were used for this work. There are individual blows of up to 10 cm in length. After a block was separated on its vertical side, a groove was cut along its outer base and the piece was felled like a tree on to a layer of earth by means of wedging action from behind. It seems that the builders also employed a sort of quarrying machine. This can be deduced from the pattern of concentric circular blows shown on some blocks. They are bigger than any man could have produced manually, so it can be assumed that the cutting tool was fixed to an adjustable lever which would hit the block with great force. Swinging radii of up to 4 m have been observed.

When the blocks of stone have been quarried, the problem of transportation arose. The biggest blocks, like the ones of the Trilithon, had their final position about 8 m above the ground located on top of the platform. The builders probably used the ancient method of "bury and re-excavate". This method was used by the Egyptians. A ramp of compacted earth is brought up to the previous layer of masonry and the next block is pushed and pulled in place over the incline. Rollers were inserted under heavy loads, often with the addition of a sort of sleigh between the rollers and the weight in order to protect the burden. Many Egyptian and Mesopotamian records of this practice exist. According to archaeologists the ancient builders didn't necessarily need any help from extraterrestrials.

According to Sitchin and other proponents of ET-involvement there are no indications of ramps or other means of transportation in Baalbek or any clues how the builders could have constructed the massive platform and podium. So the argument still continues until the excavations in Baalbek start again and maybe uncover some new clues about the past of the site. #



The UFO Research of Finland (Suomen Ufotutkijat ry) has published a new book called "Uforaportti 1" by Lasse Ahonen and Tapio Äyräväinen. The book contains all ufo-related observations that have been informed to Finnish uforesearchers in 1993 and also articles about some cases and uforesearch. The price of the book is 125 mk + postage. The book can be obtained from Suomen Ufotutkijat ry., PL 34, 24101 Salo, Finland. #